

FROM THE BOOKSHELF NO. 164
FRED COOPER

OCTOBER 26, 1976

HUMPHREY BOGART BY NATHANIEL BENCHLEY

ANNCR: THE VOICE OF AMERICA BRINGS YOU NOW, ANOTHER IN THE WEEKLY SERIES, FROM THE BOOKSHELF; A SERIES IN WHICH WE REVIEW BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. TODAY, FRED COOPER'S REPORT ON A BIOGRAPHY OF THE LEGENDARY AMERICAN ACTOR, HUMPHREY BOGART. THE BOOK IS BY NATHANIEL BENCHLEY, PUBLISHED BY LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY. HERE IS BOOK EDITOR-----.

EDITOR: THERE HE SITS -- BROODING, STARING OUT AT YOU THROUGH THE CURL OF SMOKE FROM THE EVER-PRESENT CIGARETTE. IT'S HUMPHREY BOGART, STRIKING A FAMILIAR POSE ON THE COVER OF NATHANIEL BENCHLEY'S BIOGRAPHY.

NATHANIEL BENCHLEY WAS A WRITER IN NEW YORK AND HOLLYWOOD DURING BOGART'S HEYDAY IN FILMS AND BECAME A PERSONAL FRIEND OF THE ACTOR AND HIS FOURTH WIFE, LAUREN BACALL. AND HIS BOOK IS STUDED WITH ANECDOTES AND ANALYSIS THAT ONLY A BIOGRAPHER WHO WAS ALSO A FRIEND COULD PROVIDE.

FOR THE MAN WHO BECAME ONE OF MOTION PICTURES' MOST FAMOUS TOUGH-GUYS, HUMPHREY BOGART'S BACKGROUND WAS A BIT SURPRISING. AS NATHANIEL BENCHLEY PUTS IT:

VOICE: "IF EVER A MAN WAS GENTLY BORN, IT WAS HUMPHREY DEFOREST BOGART. HIS MOTHER, MAUD HUMPHREY, WAS A PORTRAIT ARTIST WHO SPECIALIZED IN CHILDREN...HIS FATHER, DOCTOR BELMONT DEFOREST BOGART...DARK-HAIRED AND HANDSOME, WAS A MAN OF GREAT CHARM AND PROFESSIONAL ABILITY. AS A SUMMER RETREAT, HE HAD A COUNTRY PLACE ON CANANDAIGUA LAKE, IN THE FINGER LAKES OF

VOICE: WESTERN NEW YORK STATE, AND AS HIS FORMAL RESIDENCE, A
(CONT'D)

BROWNSTONE HOUSE ON 104TH STREET, TOWARD RIVERDALE DRIVE IN NEW YORK CITY. THOSE WERE THE DAYS WHEN A RIVERSIDE DRIVE DOCTOR WAS THE EQUIVALENT OF THE PRESENT-DAY FASHIONABLE PARK AVENUE DOCTOR, AND A MAN WHO COULD BOAST THAT, PLUS A MIDDLE NAME LIKE DEFOREST, COULD WELL BE SAID TO HAVE IT MADE (A HEAD START IN LIFE)."

EDITOR: BUT DESPITE THE GENTEEL UPBRINGING AND THE EXCLUSIVE BOARDING SCHOOLS HE ATTENDED, HUMPHREY BOGART DID NOT FOLLOW IN HIS PARENT'S FOOTSTEPS. AT AGE EIGHTEEN HE QUIT SCHOOL TO JOIN THE U-S NAVY. IT WAS IN THE SERVICE, NATHANIEL BENCHLEY EXPLAINS, THAT THE ACTOR GOT THE FAMOUS SCAR ON HIS LIP THAT GAVE HIM HIS MUCH-IMITATED LISP. HOLLYWOOD PUBLICITY RELEASES CLAIMED THAT THE WOUND WAS RECEIVED IN ACTION. BUT MISTER BENCHLEY POINTS OUT THAT WORLD WAR ONE HAD BEEN OVER FOR SIXTEEN DAYS WHEN BOGART GOT HIS FIRST SHIPBOARD ASSIGNMENT. ACTUALLY, THE SCAR WAS GIVEN HIM BY A FELLOW NAVY MAN WHO HAD GOTTEN INTO SOME SORT OF TROUBLE AND WHOM BOGART WAS ASSIGNED TO ESCORT TO PRISON. THE MAN HIT BOGART IN THE FACE.

HUMPHREY BOGART, WHO APPEARED IN EIGHTY-ONE MOVIES AND MORE THAN A SCORE OF PLAYS, GOT INTO ACTING BY ACCIDENT.

NATHANIEL BENCHLEY SAYS BOGART "BUNGLED HIS WAY INTO A CAREER." THROUGH FRIENDS, BOGART GOT A JOB AS AN OFFICE BOY TO A THEATRICAL PRODUCER AND LATER WORKED HIS WAY UP TO A NUMBER OF OTHER OFFSTAGE JOBS. ONE DAY, HE DECIDED TO TRY HIS HAND AT ACTING -- HE WAS TERRIBLE -- BUT HIS FRIENDS KEPT GETTING HIM SMALL PARTS UNTIL HE ACTUALLY BEGAN TO ACT

EDITOR: RATHER WELL. HE APPEARED IN STAGE PLAYS THROUGHOUT THE
(CONT'D) 1920'S, WITH MODERATE SUCCESS. BUT IT WAS THE ADVENT OF
TALKING PICTURES IN 1930 THAT GAVE BOGART HIS BREAK. WRITES
NATHANIEL BENCHLEY:

VOICE: "IT WAS A TIME OF TRANSITION FROM SILENT PICTURES TO SOUND,
AND THE STUDIOS WERE ALL FRANTICALLY LOOKING FOR ACTORS
AND ACTRESSES WHO COULD TALK. (SILENT STARS LIKE JOHN
GILBERT VANISHED WHEN IT TURNED OUT THAT THEIR VOICES
RECORDED POORLY.")

EDITOR: AGAIN A FRIEND RECOMMENDED BOGART FOR A PART. HE TOOK A
SCREEN TEST AND WAS HIRED. BOGART WAS ONLY ONE OF HUNDREDS
OF ACTORS WHO WERE BROUGHT TO HOLLYWOOD DURING THAT PERIOD --
YET HE BECAME A STAR WHEN SO MANY OTHERS FAILED. NATHANIEL
BENCHLEY EXPLAINS WHY:

VOICE: "WHAT HELPED HUMPHREY MORE THAN HIS STAGE EXPERIENCE, OR
ANYTHING ELSE THAT HE BROUGHT WITH HIM TO HOLLYWOOD, WAS THE
SIMPLE FACT THAT HE WAS A PROFESSIONAL...A PROFESSIONAL IS
A MAN WHO RESPECTS HIS TRADE, TRIES AS HARD AS HE CAN
TO PERFECT HIS WORK, AND REALIZES THAT ONE FAILURE ISN'T
NECESSARILY THE END OF THE WORLD. OR TWO FAILURES. OR
THREE. HUMPHREY WAS THE VERY ESSENCE OF THIS KIND OF
PROFESSIONAL, AS EVEN HIS DETRACTORS ARE THE FIRST TO ADMIT."

EDITOR: HUMPHREY BOGART'S FIRST FILM OUTINGS IN HOLLYWOOD WERE NOT
PARTICULARLY SUCCESSFUL. HE WENT BACK TO NEW YORK, ACTED
IN A FEW MORE PLAYS, THEN RETURNED TO THE MOVIES, RECREATING
THE PART OF A GANGSTER HE PLAYED ON BROADWAY IN THE FILM
VERSION OF "THE PETRIFIED FOREST." RAVE REVIEWS SOON WON

EDITOR: HIM MORE GANGSTER ROLES AND "BOGEY", AS HE BECAME KNOWN,
(CONT'D) WAS ON HIS WAY.

BOGART'S FILM CAREER WAS CHARACTERIZED BY A PROGRESSION OF ROLES FROM GANGSTER TO PRIVATE DETECTIVE -- WITH HIS PERFORMANCE IN "THE MALTESE FALCON." THEN TO ROMANTIC ADVENTURER, IN PERHAPS HIS MOST FAMOUS FILM, "CASABLANCA." THOUGH ACCLAIMED FOR SEVERAL OF HIS ROLES, HE WAS AWARDED ONLY ONE ACADEMY AWARD, FOR HIS PART AS ANOTHER ADVENTURER, CHARLES ALLNUT, IN THE "THE AFRICAN QUEEN," IN 1951.

WAS BOGART THE SAME TOUGH-GUY OFF-SCREEN THAT HE PROJECTED IN FILMS? HIS BIOGRAPHER PRESENTS CONFLICTING REPORTS:

VOICE: "SOME PEOPLE WILL SAY THEY NEVER SAW HIM MEAN, AND OTHERS WILL SAY THEY NEVER SAW HIM ANYTHING BUT; THERE ARE THOSE WHO WILL SWEAR THAT HIS LANGUAGE WAS IMMACULATE, AND THOSE WHO REMEMBER THE OCCASIONAL BARRACKS LANGUAGE AROUND THE HOUSE; AND THERE ARE WOMEN WHO RECOIL AT THE MENTION OF HIS NAME, AND WOMEN WHO REMEMBER HIM WITH WARMTH AND AFFECTION."

EDITOR: HE WAS CERTAINLY A CHARACTER. SOMETIMES HE INCITED PEOPLE HE ENCOUNTERED ALMOST TO THE POINT OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE, WITH BARBS AND INSULTS. BUT HIS SEEMINGLY CONTRADICTIONARY NATURE IS ALL PART OF WHAT IS NOW CALLED "THE BOGART LEGEND." THAT, AND SOMETHING NATHANIEL BENCHLEY CALLS "CLASS" (QUALITY).

VOICE: "HE ACHIEVED CLASS THROUGH HIS INTEGRITY AND HIS DEVOTION TO WHAT HE THOUGHT WAS RIGHT, AND IF THERE WERE THOSE

VOICE: WHO EITHER DIDN'T AGREE OR WHO SAW IT IN ANOTHER LIGHT,
(CONT'D) THAT WAS THEIR BUSINESS. HE BELIEVED IN BEING DIRECT,
SIMPLE, HONEST, ALL ON HIS OWN TERMS, AND THIS RUFFLED
SOME PEOPLE AND ENDEARED HIM TO OTHERS. HE COULDN'T HAVE
CARED LESS."

ANNCR: YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO FRED COOPER'S REVIEW OF HUMPHREY
BOGART, A BIOGRAPHY BY NATHANIEL BENCHLEY. JOIN US NEXT
----- (AT THIS TIME) WHEN THE VOICE OF AMERICA BRINGS YOU
ANOTHER REPORT ON ONE OF THE BOOKS AMERICANS ARE CHOOSING
FROM THE BOOKSHELF. THIS IS-----.

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WJL/RCS